

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1158

S E C R E T BANGKOK 3405

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, TH

SUBJECT: ROYAL THAI ARMY WITHDRAWS FROM CI DUTIES IN PHATTALUNG

REF: BANGKOK 2434

1. ACCORDING TO BANGKOK POST FEBRUARY 28 AND CONFIRMED BY ISOC OFFICIALS, ARMY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KRIT SIVARA HAS SIGNED AN ORDER RECALLING ARMY UNITS FROM COUNTER-INSURGENCY DUTIES IN PHATTALUNG PROVINCE. ACCORDING TO THE PRESS ACCOUNT, THE MILITARY PULLOUT HAS LED PHATTALUNG AUTHORITIES TO REQUEST THE GOVERNMENT FOR MORE PATROL POLICE REINFORCEMENTS AND FOR BETTER ARMS FOR MILITIAMEN. THE POST REPORTED THAT ABOUT 1500 VILLAGERS FROM KHAO CHAISON AND KUAN KHANOON DISTRICTS TRAVELLED TO THE PHATTALUNG PROVINCIAL SEAT TO DEMAND RESTATIONING OF MILITARY FORCES. VILLAGERS CLAIMED THEY FEARED COMMUNIST HARASSMENT. DEPUTY GOVERNOR BAMROON WAS DESCRIBED BY THE POST AS INTENDING TO BEGIN INTRODUCTION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S AW PAW PAW PROGRAM (VILLAGE SELF-DEFENSE AND DEVELOPMENT) WHICH INVOLVES THE SETTING UP OF VILLAGE-LEVEL DEFENSE UNITS. (COMMENT: IMPLEMENTATION OF AW PAW PAW ANYWHERE MUST AWAIT CABINET DECISION ON THE BUDGET.)

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2. KRIT'S DECISION TO PULL THE ARMY OUT OF

PHATTALUNG CI DUTIES FOLLOWS CLAIMS BY THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER AND THE ANTI-DICTATORSHIP FRONT, FOLLOWING A FIVE-DAY ON-THE-SPOT INVESTIGATION, THAT 868 VILLAGERS HAD BEEN KILLED OR UNACCOUNTED FOR IN ANTI-COMMUNIST OPERATIONS IN PHATTALUNG IN 1971-1972. THIS STORY RECEIVED PROMINENT TREATMENT IN ENGLISH AND THAI-LANGUAGE PAPERS ON FEBRUARY 24-25. A WEEK EARLIER (FEBRUARY 18), THE PRESS REPORTED STATEMENTS BY KRIT TO A "GROUP OF STUDENTS AND VILLAGERS FROM PHATTALUNG" THAT THE ARMY WOULD TURN OVER ISOC TO THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND THAT "I WILL WITHDRAW ALL OFFICERS AND SOLDIERS FROM ISOC". INTERIOR MINISTER LUANG ATTHASITH ON FEBRUARY 19 WAS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT ALONE WILL HAVE TO MAKE A FINAL DECISION ON THE FATE OF ISOC. HE POINTED OUT THAT THE INTERIOR MINISTRY WAS ALREADY IN CLOSE COOPERATION WITH ISOC IN COMMUNIST SUPPRESSION ACTIVITIES. LUANG COMMENTED THAT "COMMUNIST SUPPRESSION IS REGARDED AS AN INTERNAL WAR WHICH IS AS IMPORTANT AS AN EXTERNAL WAR AND THUS IT IS CONSIDERED AN EXTRA-ORDINARY ACTIVITY OVER AND OVER THE PEACEKEEPING ROLE OF THE INTERIOR MINISTRY."

3. COMMENT: SENSATIONALIZED PRESS TREATMENT OF PAST COUNTERINSURGENT CAMPAIGNS SERVES ONE IMPORTANT FUNCTION OF PUSHING THE THAI INTO A MUCH-NEEDED DEBATE ON THE BASIC PROBLEMS OF THE INSURGENCY ITSELF. IT IS VITAL THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT MAKE ITS OWN DECISIONS EARLY ON HOW IT IS GOING TO VIEW THE COMMUNIST INSURGENT MOVEMENT, WHAT POLICIES IT WISHES TO DEVISE TO GUIDE COUNTER-INSURGENT EFFORTS, AND THE DEGREE TO WHICH PLANS AND APPROACHES FRAMED BY PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATIONS WILL FIT INTO THE NEW POLICIES. AT ISSUE FIRST IS THE VILLAGE SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND DEFENSE PLAN (AW PAW PAW), DEVELOPED BY THE RTG WITH THE CONCEPT SUPPORTED BY SEATO, THE STANFORD RESEARCH INSTITUTE AND THE US. UNLESS THE NEW ADMINISTRATION CAN REACH SOME CLEAR DECISIONS WITHIN A REASONABLY SHORT TIME, IT IS

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LIKELY THAT THERE WILL BE AN END TO THE MOMENTUM ALREADY BEHIND VSDD. THIS CAN ONLY BENEFIT THE INSURGENTS. IN OUR INITIAL CONTACTS WITH THE NEW ADMINISTRATION, WE WILL URGE PROMPT ATTENTION TO THE INSURGENCY PROBLEM AND SUGGEST THAT THE DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL-INITIATIVE ORIENTATION OF VSDD HAS MERITS.
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